

Written Testimony of Representative Paul D. Tonko (NY-20)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 1: Rebuilding America's Promise

Good afternoon, Whip Hoyer and colleagues. I want to thank you for holding this hearing to consider Make it in America policies, a cornerstone of our caucus' agenda.

There were many critical issues discussed at the last hearing—improving STEM education, funding research and workforce development, and promoting advanced manufacturing, to name just a few—but I would like to speak to an issue that is more foundational.

Without investing in infrastructure, none of these other priorities will be possible. A modern economy needs modern infrastructure. The competitiveness of our nation depends on it.

We usually think of the highways, railways, ports, and airports used to bring domestically manufactured goods to market. But we also need to think of the energy and water needed to make that happen. There is a growing awareness of the crumbling roads and bridges in need of repair, but underground water systems are out of sight and not getting the attention they deserve. Clean and reliable water for residents and businesses should be a given. But sadly, our water infrastructure is in terrible shape. In 2013, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave America's water infrastructure a grade of D.

Without adequate water systems, small businesses, major manufacturers, electric utilities, and farms cannot function, let alone grow. The effects are very real as communities' ability to create and sustain jobs is at risk. And there is a direct impact on manufacturing. According to the Value of Water Coalition, 46% of water consumed in America is used by manufacturers.

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) fifth national assessment of public water system infrastructure report to Congress in 2013 showed a total 20-year capital investment need of \$384.2 billion between 2011 and 2030. That is a real increase of about \$157 billion since the first assessment was released in 1995. We are going in the wrong direction. We have a responsibility to maintain the infrastructure that is the foundation for a modern society and economy. Otherwise, we leave our children and grandchildren a tremendous maintenance bill while jeopardizing public health and future prosperity.

It is extremely difficult for financially distressed cities, let alone small communities, to find the funds to repair and upgrade their water systems. Older cities have been hollowed out and their unreliable, century-old water systems make it nearly impossible to attract new businesses and investments. Some systems still have pipes made of wood. That is right, in some places our drinking water flows through wooden pipes. Legacy cities are falling behind in competitiveness and productivity, and without proper investment in these very basic needs, they will not be able to catch up.

Earlier this year, I toured multiple municipalities' water systems in my district. While unseen, these systems are immense. The City of Albany has approximately 317 miles, or the distance from Albany to Baltimore, in pipes underground. This infrastructure is 135 years old, dating back to when Rutherford B. Hayes was in the White House. Aging infrastructure is incredibly vulnerable to flooding and other effects of climate change. Ultimately, this infrastructure must be replaced entirely because replacement valves and parts are no longer produced.

On my tours, I heard countless stories of pipes bursting, power outages, and public service interruptions, all due to a decades-long habit of disinvestment and complacency when it comes to maintaining, developing, and improving the way we utilize one of our most important commodities. My district is not unique. EPA estimates that there are 240,000 water main breaks per year. On top of that, leaking pipes lose an estimated 7 billion

gallons of clean drinking water each day. We are throwing clean water, and the money used to treat it, down the drain.

I am working on legislation to fund drinking water infrastructure. This includes the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, the primary source of federal funding to finance these projects. This bill will also provide additional funding for technical assistance to small water systems and include provisions to direct more funds to public water systems that serve disadvantaged communities. Only through robust federal investment and partnerships with states can we reduce the growing funding gap and help water utilities do what is expected in a modern society -- deliver clean, safe drinking water to homes and businesses.

Re-investing in our infrastructure is the responsible thing to do. And, there are so many benefits. In addition to creating construction jobs, these projects create demand for pipes, machinery, concrete, and other materials needed to rebuild these systems.

Water is an engine for the economy. Without safe drinking water and sound water management, it does not matter how much we invest in workforce training, STEM education or advanced manufacturing. Businesses will not invest in areas without reliable public infrastructure.

Thank you again for having me here today. Moving forward, I hope we can continue to stress the importance of water infrastructure to our Make it in America agenda. I welcome any member's input to improve the partnerships between federal, state, and local governments to tackle this funding gap and bring our water infrastructure into the 21st century.